

Early Learning and Childcare – Expansion to 1140 hours – Blueprint Documents**Report by Dr Grace Vickers, Head of Education, Education, Communities and Economy****1 Purpose of Report**

This report provides Cabinet with a summary of the blueprint documents recently published by the Scottish Government (SG) on the increase in the entitlement to free early learning and childcare (ELC) for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds from 600 to 1,140 hours per year by August 2020. It also provides an update on preparations being undertaken.

Four documents have been published: a consultation; analysis of the consultation responses; an action plan; and planning guidance for local authorities.

2 A Blueprint for 2020: Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland Consultation

The ELC Blueprint 2020 consultation document invited views on the SG's direction for the transformation of future ELC provision in Scotland. It set out key policy principles, and challenges, that will underpin the expansion, and the SG's aspirations for how a high quality, accessible, affordable and flexible ELC sector will look and operate by 2020. The consultation ran from 15 October 2016 until 9 January 2017 and included consultative events.

The consultation document can be found here: [A Blueprint for 2020: Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare Consultation](#).

Midlothian Council contributed to the consultation and this can be viewed here: <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/creating-positive-futures/expansion-of-early-learning-and-childcare/>

3 A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland – Consultation Analysis Report

This report provides an independent analysis of responses to the consultation. 336 responses to the consultation were received, 208 from individuals and 128 from organisations.

Summary of views from the responses:

- Respondents emphasised the need for clear transition plans to support children through their early-learner journey. Child-centred approaches were advocated, with parents, the ELC workforce and professionals such as health visitors all viewed as playing valuable roles.
- The ELC sector was perceived to be in need of an overhaul to present it as an attractive career choice. Negative attitudes towards men in the ELC were identified as hampering efforts to achieve a gender-balanced workforce. Implementing payment of the Living Wage and wider Fair Work practices across the ELC sector was expected to improve the profile and value of the profession.

- Much support was expressed for increased access to outdoor learning, exercise and play.
- There was support for combining the two main regulatory regimes, the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland, into one, in order to streamline accountability arrangements.
- Many respondents were in favour of childminders being part of the entitlement to ELC, perhaps within blended models of provision.
- Of those providing a clear view, most supported a demand-led model of funding, whereby funding follows the child, with parents choosing the provider, and funding being administered by local authorities.
- Support was expressed for phasing in the expanded hours, with local targeting, depending on local circumstances.

The report is available here: [A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland – Next Steps - Analysis Report](#)

4 A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland - 2017-18 Action Plan

This Action Plan commits the SG to a series of actions in 2017-18 to ensure that the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare is rooted in a high quality experience for children and to support delivery partners in building additional capacity.

That vision is underpinned by clear guiding principles of Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility and Affordability.

The consultation helped to inform the development of the policy and delivery framework for the expansion. The SG state they will work in partnership with local authorities and other key partners to deliver this vision. The Action Plan commits the SG to a series of actions to ensure that the expansion of ELC is rooted in a high quality experience for children and to support delivery partners in building additional capacity.

This Action Plan sets out the policy framework that will underpin the expansion in order to:

- Ensure a high quality experience for the child; improving outcomes for all children, especially those who will benefit most.
- Support the vision of an education system which delivers both excellence and equity for all children in Scotland.
- Provide a key contribution to the wider work to close the attainment gap.
- Support SG ambitions to reduce child poverty by contributing to the delivery of the ambitious statutory targets set out in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill.
- Support transitions through early years settings and into school to ensure continuity and progress through the learner journey.
- Offer parents increased choice of setting where they can access their funded ELC entitlement.
- Enable a system that is provider neutral with the focus on the settings best placed to deliver quality outcomes for children.
- Increase the flexibility of how the funded entitlement is delivered in order to support more parents to work, train or study, especially those who need routes into sustainable employment and out of poverty.
- Provide an opportunity for an enhanced role for childminders in delivering the funded entitlement.
- Help support parents to improve and enrich the home learning environment by integrating ELC with the range of family support.
- Enables payment of the Living Wage and the promotion of Fair Work practices.
- Be underpinned by a funding model which ensures the long-term sustainability of the system.

- Provide substantial new employment opportunities across all of Scotland with a range of roles across different qualification levels, supporting local economies.
- Reduce the costs that parents and carers face in paying for childcare, with total ELC entitlement providing an estimated annual saving of £4,500 per child per year.

There are two sections to this Action Plan. Section One focuses specifically on quality and sets out the conditions, support and investment that will drive quality experiences and ensure ELC plays a key role in addressing inequalities in child outcomes. Section Two sets out how the SG will ensure that the structures and capacity – both infrastructure and workforce – required to deliver 1140 hours are built in a way that is flexible, accessible and affordable. However, quality of the child's experience is the single most important goal and it will be clear how this has driven all of the decisions that have been taken and the actions set out across this plan.

This plan brings all of the activities planned for 2017-18 together in a single document to demonstrate the wide range of work and momentum already underway.

The plan is available here: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/03/8937>

5 A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland - ELC Expansion Planning Guidance for Local Authorities

This planning guidance offers a framework to support local authorities in developing their plans for the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare to 1140 hours by 2020.

Local authorities must submit completed expansion plans to the SG by 29 September 2017, although the plan will be subject to ongoing development and adaptation as implementation progresses and lessons are learned from pilots.

This planning guidance is intended to:

- Provide simple planning advice of specific relevance to ELC sector development.
- Support development of local authority ELC expansion plans and costings – as well as informing the national ELC Expansion Programme.
- Respect the unique context of each local authority area, recognising the value of local knowledge and understanding.
- Be outcome focused – recognising that there are a range of ways to achieve the core aims of providing ELC within the parameters of quality, accessibility, flexibility and affordability.
- Underpin the delivery support that will be made available to assist local authorities with service re-design and sharing of good practice.
- Help local authorities to gauge the extent of the change challenge and to fully resource the programme and project management capacity needed to support their local programme, whilst continuing to deliver services focused on the quality of experience for children and families.

The guidance is available here: [A Blueprint for 2020: Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Planning Guidance for Local Authorities](#)

Midlothian Council has commenced work on the expansion with Phase 1 pilots of different models of delivery in place at a number of settings (e.g. longer days) and further pilots being set up for Phase 2 starting from August 2017. An Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Board will coordinate and drive forward implementation. The Board will have representation from a wide range of staff from across the Council and its partners, and subgroups will be formed as necessary to take forward strands of the work. The timescale to complete the expansion plan by September will be challenging and will require collaborative working of all parties involved.

The SG has made it clear that local authorities must progress with expansion as early as possible, thereby making allowance for proposals to be revised or delayed before full implementation in 2020.

6 Report implications

Described by the First Minister as the “most important infrastructure project of this parliament” and “a transformational investment in the life chances of our children”, the increase from 600 to 1140 hours of free early learning and childcare by 2020 is one of the biggest projects we will undertake in Midlothian in the next few years. To make this a sustainable success for our communities, our staff and, most importantly, our children we need a wide range of staff from the Council and its partners to work together to ensure that appropriate accommodation / staffing and quality provision will be in place to meet the 1140 requirement.

6.1 Resource

The Scottish Government has stated that the increase in hours will be fully funded however it is of great importance that the Council meets its statutory duties in line with Best Value: affordably and sustainably.

6.2 Risk

If insufficient focus and resource is allocated to the expansion straight away and throughout the project the scale of the challenge is such that it will not be possible to make up later on for time lost now, resulting in the Council being unable to fulfil its statutory duties.

6.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☒ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☒ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

6.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Key priority: Reducing the gap in learning outcomes.

GIRFEMC outcomes: Children and young people are supported to be healthy, happy and reach their potential; Inequalities in learning outcomes have reduced.

6.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The early years of a child's life are key to improving their long term outcomes, through and beyond their education, therefore delivering high quality, flexible, affordable and accessible early learning and childcare in conjunction with our partnership providers will improve the Council's performance and outcomes in a range of measures.

6.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Early learning and childcare is by its very nature preventative and has long lasting effects on the outcomes of our communities.

6.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 requires local authorities to consult with parents and carers on early learning and childcare and the most recent survey has just closed. The findings from this survey, and future surveys, along with engagement with stakeholders will shape the implementation of the expansion.

6.8 Ensuring Equalities

Integrated impact assessments will be carried out as the implementation progresses, for example the admission criteria for the pilot 1,140 hour places will be assessed and the findings used to inform the final criteria.

6.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

One of the key principles of the expansion will be to ensure that it is sustainable in the long term for the Council and its partners.

6.10 IT Issues

Individual new builds and extensions will be assessed for any IT implications as they are scoped.

7 Recommendations

7.1 Cabinet is required to note the legislative requirement and work undertaken to date.

7.2 Further reports will be submitted to Cabinet and Council as information is forthcoming from the Scottish Government regarding resource requirements.

23 May 2017

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Background Papers:

[A Blueprint for 2020: Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare Consultation](#)

[A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland – Next Steps - Analysis Report](#)

[A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland - 2017–18 Action Plan](#)

[A Blueprint for 2020: Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Planning Guidance for Local Authorities](#)

